

**A Dozen Rolls-Royce Owners in South Australia in 1926**  
**“J. P. Lewis, Nelyambo Station, Wilcannia”**  
**1925 Twenty, chassis GNK86, Smith & Waddington, Sydney, Roadster**

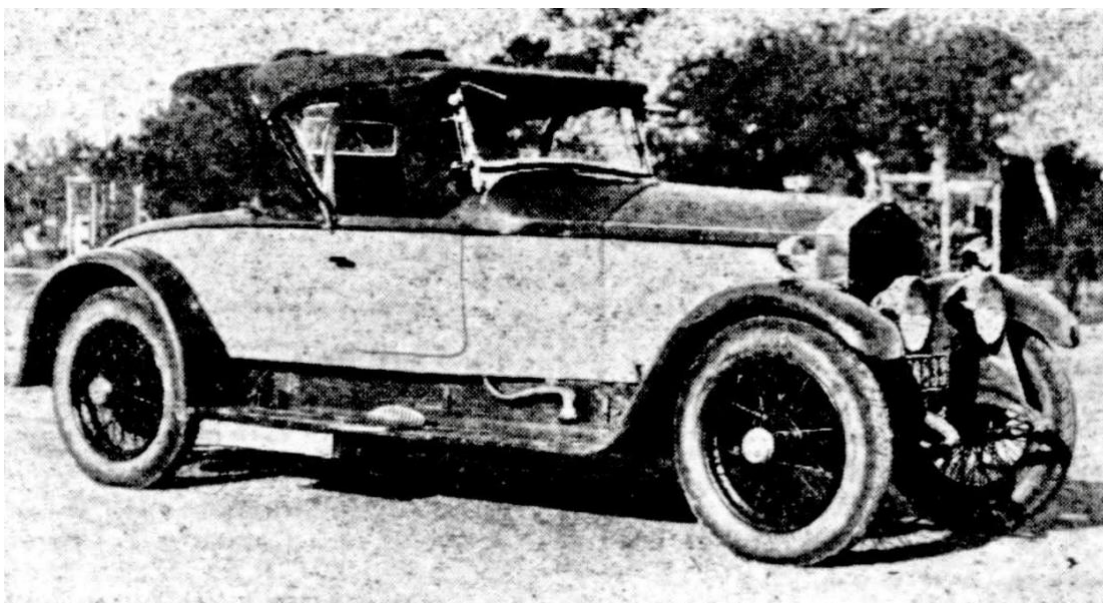
David Neely, Historical Consultant, Sir Henry Royce Foundation, Australia, 2022

“Rolls-Royce Owners – Twelve in State” was the heading of an article in the 26 January 1926 edition of the Adelaide newspaper ‘News’, which was published from 1923 to 1954.

It continued: “There are 12 owners of Rolls-Royce cars in this State so far as can be ascertained from records. On account of this rather small number casual observers usually look twice if they happen to see a Rolls-Royce purring along. Among those who are stated to own one of these cars, which are regarded as the aristocrats of the road so far as the British automobile industry is concerned are Messrs T. E. Barr Smith, Glen Osmond: T. Tait, Oaklands: C. H. Angas, Angaston: G. Milne, Brougham Place, North Adelaide: J. M. Reid, Victoria Avenue, Unley Park: J. P. Lewis, Nelyambo Station, Wilcannia: Napier Birks, Park Terrace, Parkside: Mesdames W. T. Mortlock, Martindale Hall, Mintaro: L. Hughes, Lee Lodge, Strangways Terrace, North Adelaide: M Symons, Walkerville: T.R. Scarfe, Eden Park, Marryatville: and Miss M. F. Simms, Moseley Street, Glenelg.”

**John Pierson Lewis (1893-1972)** was a pastoralist, who was born in Adelaide. Listed here with the property he owned with his brother, Leslie Joseph (1900-1954), in western NSW, his town residence was in Glenelg, Adelaide. The family’s wealth started with a brewery and hotel.

***Below:** John Lewis’s 1925 Rolls-Royce, GNK86, was photographed for the Adelaide paper, ‘The Register’, on 24 March, 1926. Lewis was pleased with the “brilliant performance” of the car and was quoted as saying, “If people knew what Rolls-Royce motoring meant there would be dozens more sold.” Lewis’s choice of the Sydney firm of Smith & Waddington rather than an Adelaide firm may have been influenced by the earlier coachwork by Smith & Waddington for Muriel Simms’s 1925 Twenty 76A5.*



Lewis's grandfather, Henry Lewis (1822-1892), purchased the Macclesfield brewery in 1867 and was the licensee of the Davenport Arms Hotel. Lewis's father, John Lewis (1857-1922), worked with his grandfather in the business and together they won 1<sup>st</sup> prize and a gold medal at the 1873 London Exhibition for their "Macclesfield" bottled beer.

*Below: Lewis's grandfather, Henry, started the family's wealth in the brewery business in 1867. The Macclesfield Brewery pictured here in 1890. [State Library of South Australia.]*



*Above: Lewis's father, John senior, ran the Napoleon Hotel on King William Street, Adelaide, before embarking on the family's pastoral enterprises in the late 1890s. The hotel is pictured here in 1919 with a subsequent proprietor. [State Library of South Australia.]*

When Lewis's father retired from running the Napoleon Hotel in King William Street, Adelaide he embarked on what would become the family's substantial pastoral enterprises. John senior was born at Macclesfield and educated at Seven Hill College near Clare. His interest in pastoral affairs began in the late 1890s when through drought, rabbits, dingoes and low wool prices station properties could be purchased for very little. He started as part owner with Roderick John Matheson of Nilpena Station, in the north of SA., in 1899. A few years later Lewis sold out to Matheson and bought Mundi Mundi Station, which lay in the north-east of SA and partly in NSW. He bought Wilpena in 1902 and by 1910 ran a conservative stock level of 20,000 sheep and 300 cattle. He purchased Wirrealpa, which adjoined Wilpena. By the 1920s he had bought Nelyambo Station on the Darling River in NSW for two of his sons, John and Leslie. He handed over Wilpena to his other son, Henry Aloysius (1889-1952).



***Above:** Nilpena Station homestead, pictured here in 1897, was situated in the north of SA. John Lewis senior purchased it in partnership with Roderick Matheson in 1899. [Wikimedia Commons.]*

***Below:** Nelyambo Station homestead, pictured here in 1924, was situated on the Darling-Baaka River 46 miles (75 kms) north-east of Wilcannia in NSW. John Lewis senior purchased it for two of his sons John and Leslie. The traditional owners are the Barkandji people. [State Library of South Australia.]*



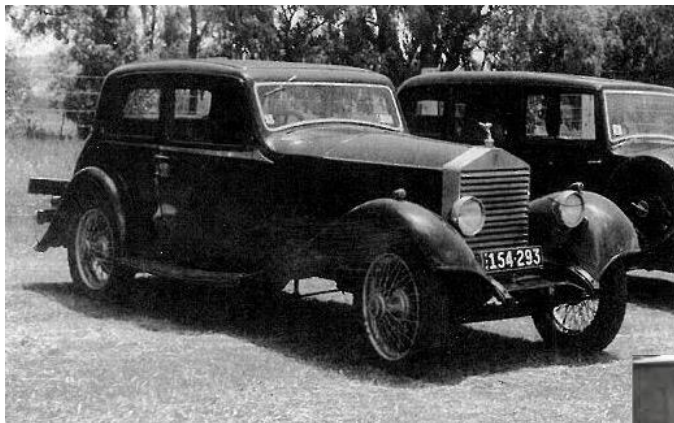


The family home was on a large property at Prospect, an inner northern suburb of Adelaide. John senior purchased it in 1911 for £4,000 and named it 'Comonella' after one of the family's properties. When John senior, a generous benefactor to the Dominican Fathers, died, the property went to his daughters, Lena, Olive and Margaret, who sold it to the Dominicans in 1951. It is now part of Blackfriars Priory School, established in 1953.

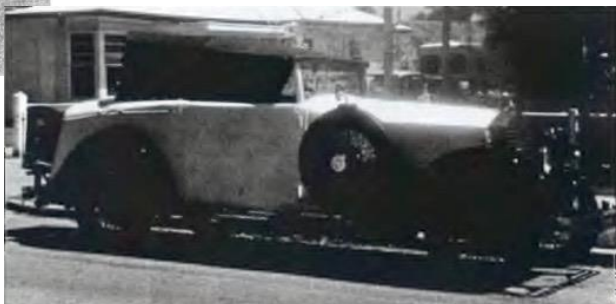
Lewis joined the Australian Imperial Force on 26 May 1915 at the age of 20. His mother, Alexandrina Helena Pearson (1870-1955), who was born in Adelaide, was given as his next of kin. It was in England that he met his future wife, Mary Alice Sugden (1902-1973), who was born in Bradford, Yorkshire. They married on 23 September 1919 at St Barnabas' Church, Heaton, Yorkshire, England. John's profession was given as "Sheep Farmer" and the same description was recorded for his father. Mary joined the Australian Women's Army Service on 13 April 1942 at the age of 40. Her husband's address as next of kin was given as 'Bulgunnia Station', Tarcoola, a sheep station in north-western SA. Mary was discharged at her own request on compassionate grounds in April 1944.

The car is a 1925 Twenty. The chassis, GNK86, completed testing in May 1925. It was delivered to the Adelaide Rolls-Royce agents, Motors Limited in August 1925. However, it was bodied in Sydney by Smith & Waddington and returned to Adelaide in March 1926 via the overland route and presented to Lewis. A photograph of the car appeared in the Adelaide paper 'The Register' on 24 March 1926. Lewis was residing at Glenelg at the time. John and Mary together their child, Peter, and a nurse had just returned from a six month's holiday in Colombo having left Adelaide by boat on 28 September 1925.

GNK86 was re-bodied about 1933 by the Melbourne firm of Martin & King as a two-door saloon coupe. It was fitted with a third body, another roadster, in the 1960s. The end came when GNK86 it was destroyed by fire in Mildura in 1990.



*Left: The 1925 Twenty, GNK86, seen here in the 1960s with the 1933 Martin & King two-door saloon coupe. Nick Lang indentified a number of Victoria Branch members who have owned the car, D Cowan (joined the Branch in 1960), Ross Phillips-Smith (joined 1960), William Meek (joined 1964) and H Dunbar Kirk (joined 1979). [Nick Lang, 'Praeclarum', August 2008.]*



*Right: The third and final body on GNK86 before its demise in a fire in 1990. [Courtesy of Chris White.]*